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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1105
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1533
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3929
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1302
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1958
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1696
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000130

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [ASEC](#)
SUBJECT: POLICE ZEALOUSLY CRACK DOWN ON OPPOSITION RALLIES

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1
.5 b/d

Summary

11. (C) Police and ZANU-PF youth paramilitaries in Harare and Bulawayo violently broke up rallies over the weekend by the two opposition MDC factions. On February 18 in Harare, riot police acting in defiance of a High Court order used water cannons, teargas and batons to prevent an anti-Senate MDC political rally of over 20,000 people, aimed at launching the MDC's 2008 presidential campaign. More than 20 individuals were seriously injured and more than 60 MDC supporters and leaders were arrested. The government-controlled press blamed the MDC for instigating the violence. On February 17 in Bulawayo, police used batons to breakup a pro-Senate MDC march attended by an estimated 2,000 supporters to launch its "Defiance Campaign" against the government. We recommend the Department issue a statement condemning the GOZ's actions (see proposed text in paragraph 12). End Summary.

Police Violently Quash Anti-Senate MDC Rally

12. (U) Approximately 1,000 riot police in Harare used water cannons, teargas and batons to prevent an estimated crowd of 20,000 from attending an anti-Senate rally on February 18 at a stadium in the densely-populated Harare suburb of Highfields. Morgan Tsvangirai, president of the MDC anti-Senate faction, had planned to announce his candidacy

for president at the event but police physically denied his entry at the stadium gates.

13. (C) Dr. Francis Lovemore, director of the Counseling Services Unit, a local NGO that provides medical services to victims of government abuse, told us that more than 20 individuals were seriously injured when police broke-up the crowd at the rally. In addition, police arrested more than 60 MDC supporters at the stadium who were preparing for the rally. These individuals have yet to be released.

High Court Order Ignored

14. (U) The GOZ crackdown occurred despite a High Court order that specifically enjoined the police from interfering with the rally. On February 16, Harare police cited the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) to deny permission for Tsvangirai's campaign kick-off, claiming that police did not

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have sufficient manpower to control the event, and that MDC events historically had been "violent." Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) lawyers successfully challenged this denial in the High Court on February 17.

15. (U) However, immediately after the High Court ruling, police began to preemptively arrest senior leaders of the anti-Senate MDC, including, on the steps of the courthouse, secretary-general and MP Tendai Biti, and, at his home, MP

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Paul Madzore. (Note: Both were still in detention as of today. End Note.) On the morning of February 18, when it became clear that police would not allow the rally to go forward, MDC officials delivered a copy of the High Court

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order permitting the rally to the commanding police officer for Harare, Thomsen Jangara. Jangara responded that he had orders from &higher-ups8 to prohibit the event despite the court order.

GOZ Paints MDC as Instigator of Violence

16. (C) According to Embassy contacts, many of the riot police at the Harare rally were actually paid members of ZANU-PF youth brigades. Their mission was to violently attack MDC members in order to provoke a reaction that would support the government's characterization of the MDC as violent. (Note: Post has heard from several sources that these youth are paid the equivalent of several hundred U.S. dollars per month, several times what ordinary police receive. End Note.)

17. (SBU) The government-controlled press dutifully ignored the brutality of the state's security apparatus and instead reported that the MDC was responsible for the violence in lurid headlines in their Monday and Tuesday editions. The GOZ-controlled Herald's edition on February 19 carried the headline "MDC unleashes violence" along with a prominent picture of supposed MDC supporters throwing stones at police and passer-bys.

18. (C) According to eye-witness reports, including that of an Embassy local employee, the violence was initiated by the riot police and in response some MDC youth began throwing stones at the police. State media accounts have highlighted injuries to four police officers who were reportedly attacked by "rowdy MDC supporters."

Pro-Senate MDC Rally Meets Similar Fate

¶9. (C) Police in Bulawayo violently broke up a pro-Senate MDC rally on February 17, attended by about 2,000, to launch its "Defiance Campaign" plan of action. Police descended on the pro-Senate MDC supporters as they walked a few blocks from City Hall to the pro-Senate faction's offices in Bulawayo.

¶10. (C) Pro-Senate MDC communications officer Maxwell Zimuto told poloff that several MDC supporters had been beaten by police, including one individual who was hospitalized. Zimuto also said that ten MDC staffers had been arrested in Bulawayo but were released on February 19 after they paid an admission of guilt fine.

¶11. (C) Pro-Senate MDC MP Abendico Bhebhe told us on February 20 that police had initially given the party permission to hold the rally, but rescinded this permission citing potential violence. Bhebhe said that pro-Senate MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube had appealed the decision to

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Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi, who responded that all political meetings had been banned.

Recommended Statement

¶12. (SBU) The Embassy recommends that the Department issue the following statement at the appropriate level condemning the actions of the GOZ:

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&The United States strongly condemns the actions of the Government of Zimbabwe in violently suppressing peaceful opposition political activity this past weekend. In defiance of a court order, riot police broke up a rally in the capital, Harare, of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at which its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was to announce his candidacy for the country's 2008 presidential election. Scores were injured and arrested for attempting to peacefully assemble and exercise their political rights.

The police also violently suppressed a rally in Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo, by the MDC's other faction over the weekend, again injuring and arresting many MDC members. We call on the Government of Zimbabwe to release those still detained and to investigate the actions of the police. Zimbabwe's deepening political and economic crises cannot be solved through continued government repression but instead requires dialogue with the political opposition, with Zimbabwe's civil society, and above all with the people of Zimbabwe who have made clear their desire for democratic change.⁸

Comment

¶13. (C) The GOZ's brutal response to the MDC rallies is yet another sign that the regime is weakening in the face of the country's economic collapse and the widespread opposition to President Mugabe's bid to extend his term past 2008. The MDC has been relatively quiet for the last year and a half, since it fractured into two factions. However, the government clearly believes the MDC still has the capacity to galvanize growing popular unrest into active opposition and to that end was willing to defy a court order and to once more use violent means to prevent legitimate opposition activity.
SCHULTZ